

ความแตกต่างทางภาษาศาสตร์ที่มีผลต่อการแปลภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ: ข้อมูล  
เชิงปริมาณจากกรณีศึกษานักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 3 มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏอุบลราชธานี  
Linguistic Differences Influencing Thai to English Translation:  
A Quantitative Data-Based Case Study of Third Year Students, Ubon  
Ratchathani Rajabhat University

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#### บทคัดย่อ

การหาข้อผิดพลาดจากการใช้ภาษาในกลุ่มผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ (EFL) อาจทำได้โดยผ่านกระบวนการทางทักษะการผลิตภาษา เช่น การพูด การเขียน หรือการแปล งานวิจัยนี้รวมวิธีการเขียนและการแปล เพื่อศึกษาความถี่ หรือรูปแบบของข้อผิดพลาดอันเกิดจากความแตกต่างทางภาษาศาสตร์ระหว่างภาษาไทยและภาษาอังกฤษ ซึ่งถือเป็นความท้าทายเบื้องต้นสำหรับผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษพบเจอ ประชากรในงานวิจัยคือนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 3 จำนวน 138 คนในรายวิชาการแปลภาษาอังกฤษ 2 โดยทำการแบ่งกลุ่มประชากรแบบสุ่มเพื่อทดสอบความสามารถ และเพิ่มระยะเวลาการเรียนรู้ร่วมกันนอกชั้นเรียน นำเครื่องมือวิจัยคือเรื่องสั้นที่แปลเป็นภาษาไทยแล้ว โดยผู้วิจัยนำไปใช้เป็นงานกลุ่มกับประชากรในระยะเวลา 8 สัปดาห์ เพื่อวิเคราะห์งานภาษาอังกฤษที่ได้มา บันทึกผลที่ได้ จัดกลุ่มข้อผิดพลาดและนำเสนอเป็นอัตราร้อยละ โดยใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาด (Error Analysis) ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ข้อผิดพลาดที่พบมากที่สุดประกอบด้วย ข้อผิดพลาดด้านรูปของคำกริยา และการใช้คำนำหน้าคำนามจำพวก Article ผลการวิจัยที่ได้อาจเป็นประโยชน์ต่อการเพิ่มเติมความรู้ด้านไวยากรณ์ในรายวิชาที่ต้องเรียนก่อน หรือรายวิชาที่ต้องเรียนพร้อมกันกับการแปลในหลักสูตรภาษาอังกฤษ เช่น ไวยากรณ์ การเขียน และการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ

**คำสำคัญ:** การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาด ข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ ความแตกต่างทางภาษาศาสตร์ การแปลเรื่องสั้นจากภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ

### Abstract

Finding language errors among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) can be conducted through the process of productive skills such as speaking, writing or translating. This research incorporates writing and translating so as to study the pattern or frequency of errors as a result of linguistic differences between Thai and English. The population consisted of 138 third-year students enrolled in the course English Translation 2, randomly grouped for mixed-ability purpose with extended time of cooperative learning outside of the regular classroom. A short story translated into Thai by the researcher was given to the participants as a research tool for the investigation of English outcome based on Error Analysis. The findings suggest the most frequent error types were the errors relating to the verb form and the article use. The results found might be useful to an understanding of grammatical structures in other courses such as grammar, writing, and English speaking.

**Keywords:** Error analysis, Grammatical Errors, Linguistic Differences, Thai-to-English Short Story Translation

### Introduction

Observations of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in the Thai context has been made among English majoring students, Ubon Ratxhathani Rajabhat University for some time. These remarks suggest that major causes many language learners are struggling with occur in speaking, writing, and translating. These errors mainly concern grammaticality, i.e. linguistic differences between Thai (henceforth L1) and English (henceforth L2) forming up the difficulties and triggering errors in the aforementioned productive skills. For example, the unique feature of verb forms in L2, which is non-existent in L1, such as the ‘-ed’ form of regular verbs indicating the past action used in *the simple past tense*, and the ‘-ed’ past participle form accompanied by ‘have’ used in *the perfect aspect*, or by ‘be’ used in *the passive voice* can all usually be mixed together.

Investigating learner’s errors can be an expanding task since these errors can really occur in vast numbers ranging from pronunciation, word choice, word meanings, to sentence construction (Kaewnuch and Boonsue, 2013). Even within a sentence, errors can be strung up adjacent to one another. For instance, in my previous work (Kohdtkam, 2016), back-to-back errors were detected in “\**The road don’t<sup>(1)</sup> have<sup>(2)</sup> car<sup>(3)</sup> pass.<sup>(4)</sup>*” This is where (1) “*don’t*” violates the rule of subject-verb agreement (“*The road*” should go with “*doesn’t*”). Secondly, in (2), the lexical verb “*have*” would make the whole sentence improper considering “the sense of existence,” not “the sense of possession” in English (“\**The road don’t have car*” is unlikely because the road can’t possess a car). Therefore, ‘*there + be*’ should be used instead. Thirdly, in (3), ‘*cars*’ should be in use instead of ‘*car*’ according to the English sense of plurality, allowing the choice ‘*there + be*’ in (2) to change

into '*there are*' and to come into play. Finally, the verb '*pass*' in (4) is in its finite form and will make the whole unit a "run-on sentence" with two main verbs, '*are*' and '*pass*,' so '*pass*' should be changed to a *present participle* '*passing*.' The final result can be presented as, for example, "*There are no cars passing by on the road.*"

As can be seen, grammatical loads and numberless errors occurring in a chosen chunk make an investigation of errors a difficult task. When this happens, what to be analyzed really depends on the researcher. As for the scope of this study, every aspect emerged as *one time* of that particular type of errors shall be taken. For example, if an error reads "*\*an criteria*," both the misuse of "an" in front of a beginning consonant sound and a lack of awareness of plural form of the noun "criteria" should all be counted. Grammatical errors are significant because in some other instances during the researcher's observations, considering learner's errors of productive skills like speaking, writing, and translating altogether, grammaticality accounts for every aspect of language performances. These grammatical errors occur in the grammar courses extending to writing courses, speaking English in daily life, and, furthermore, translation courses in which grammaticality should be well-handled beforehand since there are some more advanced skills needed in translation than grammatical details.

The present paper aims at finding grammatical errors which shall be deemed to be the first-hand challenge English non-native learners encounter prior to translation-editing skill or delicacy in translations. It quantitatively points out commonly observed grammatical errors among the Thai students. Accordingly, it may contribute to the enrichment of grammaticality in any other pre-requisite or co-requisite courses under the English curriculum such as grammar courses, writing courses, and speaking courses.

## Literature Review

This analysis of translation errors incorporates productive skills of writing and a more advanced skill at translating. *Productive skills*, or *active skills*, is a continuum of *receptive skills*, or *passive skills*, from which they develop. In the course of progress, learners observe their language experience using receptive skills before they try out their language through productive skills as a method of information expression in a written or spoken form (Golkova and Hubackova, 2014).

Work on error analysis involves much of writing skill. Yumanee and Phoocharoensil (2013) suggested that "It is undeniably difficult for EFL learners to perform native-like writing." It is seen as a difficult skill because several other difficulties regarding writing may be encountered (Mongphet and Singhasiri, 2009). Even though *writing* and *speaking* are subsumed under the *productive skills*, they are distinct from each other in a number of ways. One of their unique features is that speaking takes place in an immediate manner, while writing requires time (Mahamongkol, 2006). In other words, a writer can have their

written work satisfactorily corrected and revised in an extended time. By that, we can take it as an advantage for writing compared to speaking with regard to time constraint. However, as with greater comfort than speaking as it sounds, writing, out of the four integrated language skills, is the most difficult skill for learners (Tangpermpoon, 2007). It can make a hard task for EFL learners to organize their elements in a native-like manner on the one hand and for instructors to find ways to correct them and to design remedial lessons on the other.

When a learner misuses an individual vocabulary either with its incorrect meaning in the context or with its incorrect form, we take it as a *lexical error*. Lexical errors can be treated in two ways: *semantic-based errors* and *grammar-based errors* (Tangpermpoon, 2007). *Semantic-based errors* involve the need to treat individual words carefully as each word holds specific meanings, and once one is chosen in place of the intended counterpart, communication may fail, for example ‘I love my *study*’ instead of ‘I love my *school*’ in a context of a wrong choice of ‘study’ for ‘school’ or the other way around. On the other hand, *grammar-based errors* include grammatical functions (e.g. tense, word order, agreement, plural markers) where substantial meanings may remain for further reference within communicability. This paper corresponds to the latter from which the quantitative data are presented and discussed.

Translation involves more advanced skills than knowing about the target language, in the same way as put forward by Kobsiriphat (2005) and Surasit (2007). Other than the knowledge of English (L2) and Thai (L1), translation heavily deals with linguistic and cultural awareness, adoption of skills in, after great exposure to, reading and writing, knowledge of real use of L2, and translator’s own rhetoric and editing skill.

A translation course is a challenge for learners’ ability to transfer information between the two languages especially when considering their linguistic differences. It is difficult for an EFL learner to write or translate without any mistakes. The course English Translation 2 should, therefore, be appropriate for finding possible errors in L2 production as a source of evidence to support the researcher’s observation, a collection of actual errors, and further solutions to any problematic points in the findings for sustainable English learning in the EFL context like Thailand.

## Hypotheses

The development of hypotheses started from the view on *first language transfer* through comparison of similarities and differences between the first language and the second language to predict errors and difficulty in learning in the *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis* (CAH). In the CAH perspective, errors are predictable occurring due to different structures of the two languages: similarities facilitate learning, while differences hinder learning. To an opposing view of CAH, however, it is said to only focus on the language structure but fails

to include the active role of the learners (Zaki, 2015) with which learners use while producing errors and actually learning something.

This is where *Error Analysis Hypothesis* emerged holding the view that adults' L2 language acquisition resembles that of children's L1 acquisition with its own rule. The EAH views that errors are a part of second language acquisition as it is with a child acquiring his first language. This knowledge is referred to as the so-called "*transitional dialect*" as a result of a system itself, which learners use in the task of learning from repeated application of underlying rules of the target language. It is said that errors play a crucial role in language learning in that once an error is made, it suggests the learner's current understanding of the L2 rules, which is interpreted that they learn something and try to discover the language (Lightbown and Spada, 2006; Lennon, 2008; Rustipa, 2011). To this view, it can be interpreted that errors are not simply derived from the sameness and differences between L1 and L2, but linguistic tryouts by the language learners.

Hence, to the scope of this study, errors shall be viewed as a part of language learning which is important and inevitable, without which there would be no improvement in second language learning (Lennon, 2008; Rustipa, 2011). By accepting *error expectation* in language production, much attention is initially paid to *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis*. While taking possible explanations for cognitive attempts made into language tryouts by learners deals much with *Error Analysis Hypothesis*.

## Methodology

The research tool in this study is a Stage 2 reading material by Oxford Bookworms Library collections, a retold, simplified version with presumably easier translation for the population of third year students. The English original version has been translated into Thai for the analysis of participants' English. The plot-twist short story is about a homeless man in New York City who has been trying every way to get into prison in the winter struggling for a warmer place and food. Simultaneously designed to encourage the participants in pleasure reading, the tool involves *writing skill*, *translation skill*, and *collaborative work* outside of regular classroom with extended time provided.

138 third-year English majoring students enrolled in the course *English Translation 2* in the academic year 2018, Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University are the research participants, randomly formed up into mixed-ability groups. Each group consisting of 5-7 students was assigned to translate the Thai story into English. After 8 weeks, the assignment was due, and the data were collected, recorded, and analyzed.

## Results and Discussion

The quantitative data are presented on the frequency grounds. The most frequent errors are shown as: **(1) Verb forms** (282 errors) and **(2) Article Use** (145 errors).

### 1. Verb Forms

282 errors of “Verb Forms” are reported as the most frequent linguistic issue in this study. These errors are further classified under (1.1) *Use of Present Tense for Past Tense* (219 errors) and (1.2) *Mixed-Structure Errors* (63 errors) in the ratio of 78%: 22%, as depicted in the following pie chart:

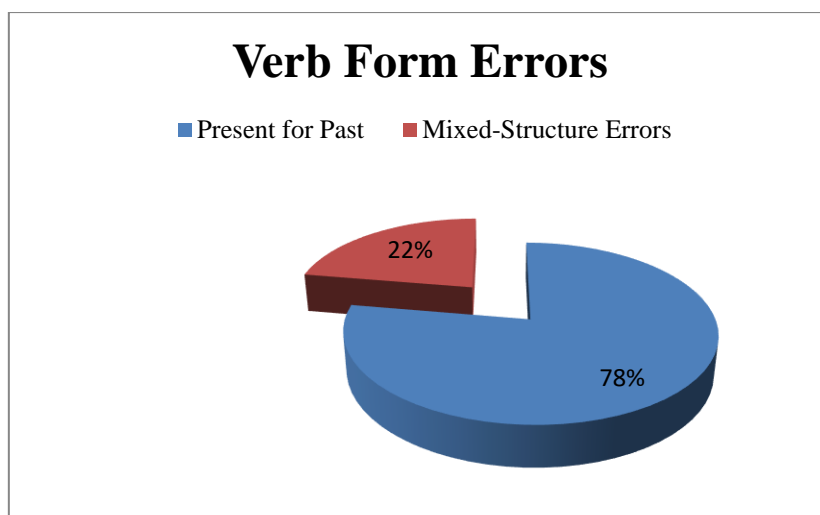


Figure 1: Verb form errors as the most frequent case in this study

#### 1.1 Use of Present Tense for Past Tense

The following table summarizes the erroneous areas of 219 errors in (1.1) *Use of present tense for past tense*:

Verb Form Errors: <i>Present Tense for Past Tense</i>			
Items	Areas of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
(A)	Present for past with subject-verb agreement	115	52.51
(B)	Present for past without subject-verb agreement	53	24.20
(C)	Present together with past with subject-verb agreement for present	25	11.42
(D)	Present together with past without subject-verb agreement for present	21	9.59
(D)	Present for past with multiple verbs in which at least one without subject-verb agreement	5	2.28
	<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1: Error types of present tense for past tense in detailed areas

According to Table 1, it is obvious that the learners lack the knowledge of past tense use in narratives, thereby selecting the present tense in their writing. In detail, the present tense for past tense with and without subject-verb agreement, the first two highest percentages, in (A) and (B) equaling to 52.51% and 24.20%, respectively, give evidence for this ignorance. The problem for (A) includes sentences like “\*Soapy **sits** on the bench in Madison Square in New York” where present tense is preferred in the narrative and “\*“Do you know who **breaks** the glass?”” where a past action (yielding a *present perfect* consequence) is treated as a present simple tense. In a sentence using present tense for past tense without subject-verb agreement in (B), an example is given as in “\*Soapy **look** at police.”

In the next orders of the present tense together with the past tense with and without subject-verb agreement in case of the present tense use in (C) and (D) making 11.42% and 9.59%, respectively, may affirm that learners still struggle with distinguishing between the notions of *present* and *past* tenses, yielding sentences like “\*So that **is** the normal way that he **did** as usual in winters” and “\*Sopy **knew** that he **have** to make the plans.” However, when considering *subject-verb agreement* in the present tense, a two times higher percentage of correct use in (A) than (B), and a slightly higher one in (C) than (D) are yielded, which may suggest a good sign of learning about *subject-verb agreement* in the present tense. Finally, the smallest percentage of 2.28 in (E), *the present tense use with multiple verbs in which at least one goes without subject-verb agreement* indicates that a few learners may have found the idea of subject-verb agreement confusing even if they already had the correct forms of the other verbs in the sentence as evident in such sentences as “\*He **walks** slowly and **come** to a street is full of theatre” and “\*Now Sophie **is** furious and he **throws** the umbrella and **say** some bad things about police.”

## 1.2 Mixed-Structure Errors

63 errors in (1.2) *Mixed-structure errors* are elaborated in the following table:

	Verb Form Errors: <i>Mixed Structures</i>		
Items	Areas of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
(A)	Mixed structures of simple and progressive aspects	16	25.40
(B)	Overgeneralization of verb forms after infinitive 'to' and 'modal'	16	25.40
(C)	Problems of 'be' conjugations	5	7.93
(D)	Problems of 'not' and main verb without a helping verb	4	6.35
(E)	Past verb form in present or future	4	6.35
(F)	Other miscellaneous problems of verb forms	18	28.57
	<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2:** Error types of mixed structures in detailed areas

The error type of mixed structures reveals the errors in (A) *Mixed structures of simple and progressive aspects* and (B) *Overgeneralization of verb forms after infinitive 'to' and 'modal,'* shares the same percentage of 25.40. In (A), the emphasis on distinction between the *simple aspect* of “**Subject + Main Verb in Base Form**” and the *progressive aspect* of “**Subject + Be + Main Verb with -ing**” should be placed; otherwise, the mixture of the two aspects as in the example erroneous sentences in “\**The police officer **staring** at them*” and “\**Sophie **was not escape***” may recur. For (B), verb forms that change after infinitive ‘to’ and ‘modal auxiliaries’ (e.g. “\**to **helped**,*” “\**I might **made***”) suggest overgeneralization that learners make for their task according to tense awareness.

Next, the problems of ‘be’ conjugations in (C) shown as 7.93% may indicate the challenging feature of ‘be’ as to its form change according to person, number, and tense (for example, “\**that **be** happier*”). The other two groups of errors having the same frequency of four times (6.35%) include (D) *Problems of 'not' and main verb without a helping verb* and (E) *Past verb form in present or future*. The errors of negative forms in (D) occur in a likely native language influence in that they are treated as the mother tongue structure without a helping verb (for instance, “\**Soapy **not escape***”), and the sense of present fact or future action is treated as the past tense in (E) including the four errors as in “\**Of course it **was** my umbrella,*” “\**If you buy me a drink ... We **went** before the police come and see us,*” “\**I **went** to the city and looking for work,*” and “\**Sopy decided to change his life and **was** a new man,*” all concerning the knowledge of tense uses.



The most frequent case in *other miscellaneous problems of verb forms* is shown in (F) as 28.57%. Because the errors belonging to this group include those with unique features appearing in separate distributions, they are grouped together in one category. An example of this group includes: (1) “\*He **jumped looked** round quickly” with the problem of consecutive main verbs; (2) “\*and he **has began** to try his first plan” with the wrong verb form of the perfect aspect; (3) “\*He **was force** to spin around by the waitresses” with the wrong verb form of the passive voice; (4) “\*He **was fidgeted** on that bench,” a mistaken passive structure with intransitive verb; (5) “\*Soapy **decided going** to jail” with ‘gerund’ instead of ‘to’ infinitive; and (6) “\*He stopped **to make** a noise” with ‘to’ infinitive instead of ‘gerund.’

## 2. Articles

The problems of *articles* emerge as the other type of the most frequent errors including the issue of use among *a/an*, *the*, and the “zero article,” where ‘*a/an*’ is used repeatedly with the nouns having already been referred to, and ‘*the*’ is selected in the first time a noun is mentioned and anywhere else unnecessarily. In other cases, articles are simply left out where necessary. All **145 errors** of this type are shown as follows:

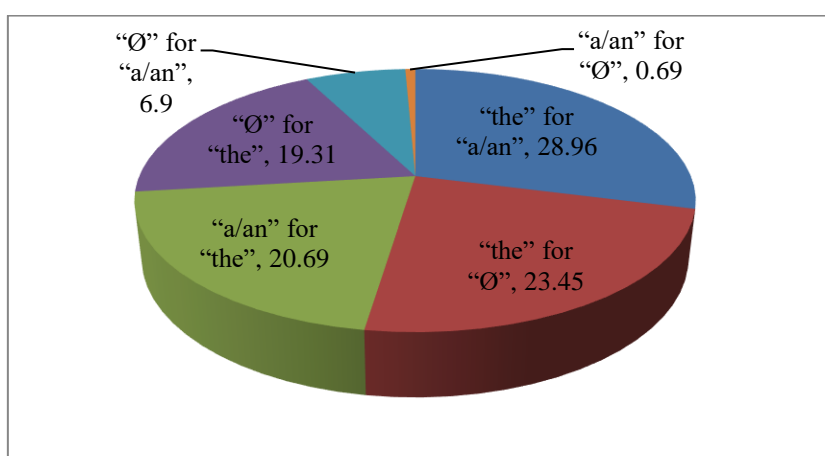


Figure 2: Categories of 145 errors of article usage

Figure 2 displays the rate at which an appropriate article is replaced by another. The most frequent case out of 145 article errors (42 errors or 28.96%) is the use of “the” for “a/an,” for example “\*Soapy sits on **the** bench in Madison Square in New York” and “\*I took that umbrella from **the** restaurant” in a way that the noun is introduced in the story for the first time. In the second frequent error type of 34 errors or 23.45%, “the” replaces the “zero article” as in “\*Soapy sat on the seat in **the** Madison Square” and “\*And **the** poor Soapy walk away with that girl still clinging to him.” The third group of “a/an” use instead of “the” such as “\*He spoke with **a** girl again” and “\*The man who own **an** umbrella

*is unhappy*” is of 20.69% (30 errors). The use of the “zero article” instead of “the” and “a/an” appears in the fourth and fifth ranks (28 and 10 errors) having the percentages of 19.31 and 6.9, respectively. An example of the “zero article” for “the” is “\*--*Policeman said*” and “\*--*Moon moving high in the sky*”; those for the “zero article” instead of “a/an” include “\*It was --nice, bright *location*” and “\*Immediately, she stopped at --street *corner*.” There was only one error in the use of “a/an” for the “zero article” (0.69%) in “\*Sopy decided to go to *a jail*.” For the least frequent error type, however, it may suggest that the learner may find a possible way to refer to “*a jail*” where there are some or many in that big city.

The use of “*the*” both for “a/an” and the “zero article” altogether shares the most portion of the article use error type, of 52.41%. According to this, there might be a tendency among the participants to take “*the*” as the basic form of article whenever it comes to article usage.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

The quantitative data suggest urgency of learner’s more complete insight into English grammar and structure. Because translation involves more complex dimensions of structural surface, it is hardly possible if the starting points are ignored. All quantitative errors suggest this structural importance and reflect the different natures of L1 and L2. The issue of **verb forms** suggests *verb inflections*, L1 and L2 different time-indication in *tenses*, *aspects*, including other grammatical details of *mood* and *voice*, and **article use** specifically suggests the part of speech of the determiner type in L2, again, non-existent in L1.

Because the research tool is a short story in 22 work pieces, it has much to do with the myriad errors in accordance with the literature reviews. Another shortcoming of this paper is that it is unable to include all the other aspects of the linguistic productions majorly concentrated in grammaticality. However, the most two frequent cases of errors, **verb forms** and **article use**, do suggest that grammaticality is still a challenge to language learners even if they have undergone the grammar courses prior to the translation courses and do confirm that grammatical knowledge is important before the *get-the-feet-wet* step into the actual translation can take place.

Further studies may have to restrict the scope of how the data will be intensively investigated. For example, a qualitative data suggesting the phenomenon of the case study’s *article use*. Researchers interested in extensive investigation of errors may find it challenging to test other groups of population, for example students of different college years and Thai students of other majors using easier translation pieces. Regarding grammatical issues, the results obtained from this study will have to be considered for prerequisite or corequisite courses of the *English grammar* as part of the simultaneously integral involvement in translation.

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